

TOWN OF TYNGSBOROUGH

Board of Selectmen

25 Bryants Lane

Tyngsborough, MA 01879

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December 15, 2011

Ms. Ann Berwick
Chair
Department of Public Utilities
One South Station
Boston, MA 02110

Dear Ms. Berwick:

The Tyngsborough Board of Selectmen offers these comments as a testimonial to the response of National Grid to the snowstorm of October 29-30, 2011.

As you know, northwest Middlesex County was impacted by heavy, wet snowfall during this weekend storm. Snow easily and quickly accumulated on leaves that remained on many tree limbs, eventually causing those limbs to break and in most cases fall to the ground. Nearly every property owner in Tyngsborough was impacted by this phenomenon.

Throughout town, falling limbs brought down utility wires. Most significantly impacted were electrical wires owned and maintained by National Grid, the electrical utility serving our community. These wires were ripped from poles, and in some cases poles snapped due to the weight.

At the height of the storm, 94% of our community was without electrical power. For our public infrastructure, this forced our Fire and Police stations to utilize emergency backup generators. Traffic signals were without power, as were our Public Schools and our Council on Aging. Our Town Hall was without power for three days.

The damage to trees in Tyngsborough was caused by the storm was due to an uncontrollable act of mother nature. Unfortunately, the resultant power outages and associated property loss was overwhelmingly preventable.

In our post-storm de-briefings (both for Hurricane Irene and this snowstorm), we have identified three major areas of concern: lack of preventative maintenance, delayed deployment of on-the-ground crews, and lack of adequate communication between National Grid and Town officials.

Lack of preventative maintenance

Tyngsborough is a hybrid suburban/rural community built within dense forest. While there have been occasional tree maintenance crews, limited to only a few vehicles once per year,

there has been no sustained, coordinated utility preventative maintenance program enacted in town.

It should be noted that in recent years, there have been many smaller-scale power outage events caused by tree damage that can be attributed to a lack of preventative maintenance. Most recently, power was cut to the Town Hall on a clear day when a tree fell on the line.

Additionally, it should be noted that there has been virtually no follow-up effort to replace streetlights that were broken during the storm and/or the cleanup.

Delayed deployment

Snowfall ended around dawn on Sunday morning, October 30th. This was approximately 14 hours after the storm began and 18 hours after the Town had initiated a coordinated response. Tyngsborough Highway Department crews worked to clear roads both with plows and heavy equipment through the night, and shifted their efforts to removing heavy tree debris from roads late Sunday morning. A warming center was opened for residents, and it became an overnight shelter at 4:00 pm on Sunday.

Town officials were not aware of any substantial National Grid presence until mid-day Monday, October 31st – nearly 2 days after the storm began, and more than 24 hours after it had ended. Substantial restoration did not occur until late Tuesday, while hundreds remained without power through late Thursday. Some did not see their power restored until Friday night and Saturday morning.

Lack of adequate communication

Initially, the information gleaned came from coordinated conference calls which, while informative, included only a piece of the puzzle. Town officials were forced to determine our overall status in the restoration process by piecing together the comments offered during conference calls with the information we could gather from the limited crews on-the-ground.

Ranking National Grid officials came to Town on the Tuesday following the storm and assured the Town of improved communication through a designated liaison who would participate in Town coordinating meetings and provide accurate information as to progress and restoration time. While the gentleman was clearly committed to helping Tyngsborough and its residents, he was put in the unfortunate situation of simultaneously having to learn the electrical grid as it relates to Tyngsborough while providing us up-to-minute information as to restoration progress. We often found that estimated timelines were inaccurate. Finally, we found that often it was our own knowledge of the Grid that was being utilized to guide restoration efforts – a situation caused by the lack of firsthand knowledge by the liaison.

It is important to note that similar communication issues also occurred during the response to Tropical Storm Irene in early September, and that there was no designated liaison at that time.

Solutions

While we have taken this opportunity to detail our criticisms of National Grid, we hope that the result will be twofold:

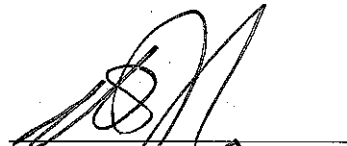
- **First, a commitment by National Grid to enact a comprehensive tree maintenance program in the town of Tyngsborough, working alongside Tyngsborough crews, to decrease the encroachment of limbs to the utility corridor.**
- **Second, a commitment by National Grid to assign a permanent liaison to work with the Town and who will come into emergency situations fully apprised of local system operation and routes, restoration strategies, and local/regional crew operation.** This permanent liaison would also work with the Town during local training exercises and become intimately familiar with the nature of Tyngsborough storm response operations – outside of the pressures of an emergency response..

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

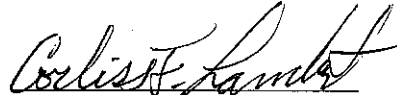
Sincerely,



Rick Reault
Chairman


Robert Jackson
Vice-Chairman

Elizabeth Coughlin
Clerk


Corliss Lambert
Allen Curseaden

cc: Senator Eileen Donoghue
Representative Colleen Garry